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Bard

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With and without
define the life

a line left from sleep
(a line lost from sleep

archive? action?
a word beginning A

lost into day)

leaves left on my table
to be deciphered

pale this one, as if a maple tree
tried to imagine the desert,

green sand, a jackal howling.

(Actaeon, Actaeon it is,

man falling into his animal,
water cool round his dwindling knees.

3 October 2005

SIGNS

Lush here even with so little rain –
the difference.

What makes the difference,
angels? Water table?
These Christian latitudes?

When Beauvais fell
it took religion with it.
The fall of that tower meant Reformation
and all that came after,
the so-called Enlightenment.

Every great culture has a tower fall—
and when its perch falls down
the owl flies.

That's what 9/11 meant,
sad sign we could not help but read.

3 October 2005

=====

There are the things. I think they are thinking about you. But what do I know.
Once in a while, sometimes even once a day I am clever enough to keep silence.
Listen to things laugh. The things thinking about things. The things think the
way things think. Trees, are trees things? Or become things, sticks, stalks,
stems: dead things we say. Something flies out of the dead wood. Owl.

3 October 2005, Hance Cottage

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All the workers have left the maze. Elm leaves scud up through the yew alleys. At the center a marble plinth with nothing on it. Stone stump. One who came to the center could sit down there on the stone. Could be the statue such a stone is meant to support. Could be the god such a statue is meant to represent. But such a one does not often come. One at the center: it is not easy to be that one. It is not even easy to sit quietly there, the wind and so on. Outside, over the neatly trimmed hedges higher than a tall man, the mansard roof of an old building would be seen, from here though one can't tell its nature or its task. So often one can't tell.

3 October 2005, Hance Cottage

=====

Leaves anew
everyday a thank

old Tocharian
word for love

o pay attention
little boy

in the back of the mind
room or girl the distances

so great so great
Oktyabr. Октябр

Being thankful is thankful. Thinkful is keeping in mind. The color of gold, for instance, waits behind every other color to be said. For its time. Its shine. To say thank you is to think of you again. When the word meant 'love.'

4 October 2005

MY HAIR

The quality of my hair has changed. Light gossamer gives way to thick wondering.

My hair is the hair of a man puzzled about something.

The wind moves it always to one side, like the Red Sea, it was red once, so that shivering refugee thoughts can pass through into exile.

My hair remembers massacres, and masturbations, and opera arias over WHOM in dingy barber shops, my hair is always afternoon.

My hair discovers a new religion every five minutes and soon relapses into its natural atheism.

Where does a thought go when it is gone?

Long ago I realized that bald men can't or don't think at all anymore. They have become one single complicated thought which they go on with ever after, growing always simpler. All the rest of thinking fell out one by one.

Or in the case of monks got carried away by the razorblade, tonsure, circumcision of the mind.

My hair is heathen and various, my hair is hideous and has no color, my hair keeps me warm and keeps me thinking, and all I can think about it my hair.

Because I am old Narcissus. I who never succumbed to the allurements of that dark pool. I resisted that alien beauty down there till it had vanished forever from any mirror, and settled down into the magical silt at the bottom of every well. Of every thought.

My hair has the color of ash the color of salt. But my hair is not those things at all. My hair is not ash, is not salt.

My hair feels sometimes like the touch of somebody else when that dratted wind moves light through it. My hair is another.

My hair is not my hand, my hair is an empty cup with dregs of wine dry at the bottom, sticky red wine from a steep hillside beside a cold river.

My hair is a bunch of tired fishermen displaying their meager catch. My hair is a child on the bank consoling them and asking for a fish for his own self.

My hair is an abandoned house on the way to Rockaway Beach. The Irish are all gone. My hair is the third window on the left, glass gone too, a seagull perched on the sill, who knows what could be still left inside.

My hair is a sheeted ghost hovering at my left side as I shuffle along, pressing my elbow, reminding me of something over and over in the incomprehensible chewy language of the dead.

4 October 2005

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The problem is that everything is message.

But they are quiet today

a mind in love with itself

has a lover's quarrel

the air just cool enough to feel

and nothing moving. Why is October?

Why does it lift the heart and pause the breath

like a word spoken in a foreign language

I suddenly understand? Epic

of the ordinary, straight blue sky.

Close to something now.

All the big questions

answer themselves by being spoken

asked out loud. You for instance

the way sometimes you realize

you are now finished with a friend.

5 October 2005

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But what would happen if Osiris isn't slain?
If November goes deathless to meet the new light –
would there *be* light there? Does a god have to die
to be a god at all? Is there one who doesn't
or who isn't? The god of appearances
makes a disappearance. The sun god
goes down into the night. The one thing
doesn't die is the mind noticing
all that coming and going. Just noticing.

5 October 2005

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Is there anything other kind of knowing
except noticing what is going on?

This crow above me, for example,
reciting urgently everything I know.

5 October 2005

"The heart's rough quiet"

(--Liz Kilduff quoting Katie Roiphe)

The rough is dearer than the quiet.
If I had a heart the way I have hair
something you can see for yourself
and judge what kind of day I've had
and what winds were blowing, if
I had a heart I would want it rough
hard as the wooden clapper of a leper

hard as the innocent alphabet blocks
kids are given by ever-hopeful parents
eager to instruct them, A an ape,
B a bear, L a lion, E an elephant,
need I go on, learn these and rule the world.

If I had a heart it would be blocks of wood
and blocks of stone all piled up
toppling over in the quarry in the lumberyard
broken glass coke bottles bottles of gin

blocks of wood with letters on them
heavy sharp they hurt your brother when
you throw at him G a gorilla or S a snake
and the sharp vertex of the cube bites

his forehead bleeds he squeals
like P a pig and you're triumphant
you're ashamed, if I had a heart
I would be ashamed like that,

ashamed of wood and blood and stone
of brotherhood and alphabets
and all the quiet little lies that break the heart.

5 October 2005

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And if it were *night*

— that famous thing —

whenever it gets dark,

would it be poetry?

Up there a moon keeps meaning something else.

5 X 05

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One wonders about all this entropy
as if a word could run out of sound
or a sound inherit meaning
from all those dancehalls, lovers, nights. Nights!

5 X 05

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Find a place in me for you

--that's all I ask.

Find it and move in

and answer the door when anybody calls.

5 X 05

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A kind of money
from the sky
he was drunk
he tried to catch
trout with bare hands
no fish no blame
wet smile
soaked socks nothing
more and nothing more
it was one of those
late afternoons when
everything pays attention.

5 X 05

=====

Too tired to know what I'm thinking.
Robe hung on the back of the door. Wind
on the empty lawn. Not thinking.
Not even not thinking. Something less
but still hard to find. How long it took
humans to analyze the air. How much this
and how much that. How much you
I can do without before I suffocates.

5 October 2005

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Don't ever leave someone alone. You never can tell what someone will do if left alone with someoneself. There are *things* something could make use of, *actions* someone could think about for a long time and maybe put into practice.

Someone could stand in a small dark place and say *words* out loud to someoneself. Or even to another though the other would be *not present*, far away, inattentive, months gone, not born, long dead, trapped in an elsewhere kind of language no one knows. Even so, someone might speak to another. What would become of such words if spoken? Where would they go? Must such words, unheard, vainly chase *each other* forever, blue glints in heaven, midges in autumn sunshine, specks of dust in the sunray through someone's hotel room window, forever? Never leave someone alone. By the time someone, all alone, got tired of playing with things, performing actions, speaking words, by then the world all round might be terribly changed. Or not at all. Maybe not at all. And someone might be somebody else and nobody knows.

6 October 2005

= = = = =

Many times to talk
or too listless to. A face
broken out with little letters
speaking all over it
blue vowels, red consonants
semi-colons made of diamonds,
a face peering through the clouds.

Every surface tries to talk to me.
But will a letter so composed
get through the merchant mail?

Will they understand this kiss?
Ten thousand years the waves come on
bringing maybe the same message from the sea
nobody ever could or ever will read
and still they keep arriving. Fill up the world
with trees and trees with leaves
until one day someone finally understands.

6 October 2005

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And this much I mean to mean—
a star wrapped in a napkin
a little vomit-spotted
left at the side of a Friday night car.
Now something is missing from the sky.

6 October 2005

=====

Things to wait for –

a door to speak

a road to come home for good

moonlight in your pocket

you can take out

you can give it to a very dear friend

who looks at it in your hand and says What is this?

6 October 2005

= = = = =

Mighty, mighty as airy
as a woman is a book
as lightly as a tree is a dance
my dear, we have never spoken of the dance.

Yet we have to some day,
the woods grow up through interweaving
branches touch. Dance
in perfect stillness. Speak
our silence. Ancient lines
over landscape, over islands, over
the bull horns leap.

Not a move but a word.
Mighty as air, he
waits for you in the roots of everything.

6 October 2005

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What could the other be,
panoply, canvas stretched
taut on the horizon, the low
towers of the Bronx come into view
soon as you cross the border and
there is a pathetic little bridge
and then the city, always a bridge.
Mostar, Saarbrücken, and never
will I understand. Blunt
towers with a thousand families,
a skyscraper on the Persian Gulf
rising from the water, a girl's
midriff bared for Indian summer.

6 October 2005

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The dead can't make mistakes.

Of all things, the most
important thing I learned
was how to be wrong.

*

On the other hand, Thomas Meyer discovered a new mode of aesthetic liberty:
Write as if one were a dead poet, a poet from long ago, and nothing can happen
any more except *understanding*. Write into a perennial awakening, into
understanding.

Write as if one were a dead author. Write as if one were another.

*

But still I want to be wrong. I have a bottle of new ink to be wrong with. Lead
an ox into a library, and let him forget his ignorance. Who knows after all in
what brain, if any, all these words speak and go on meaning?

6 October 2005